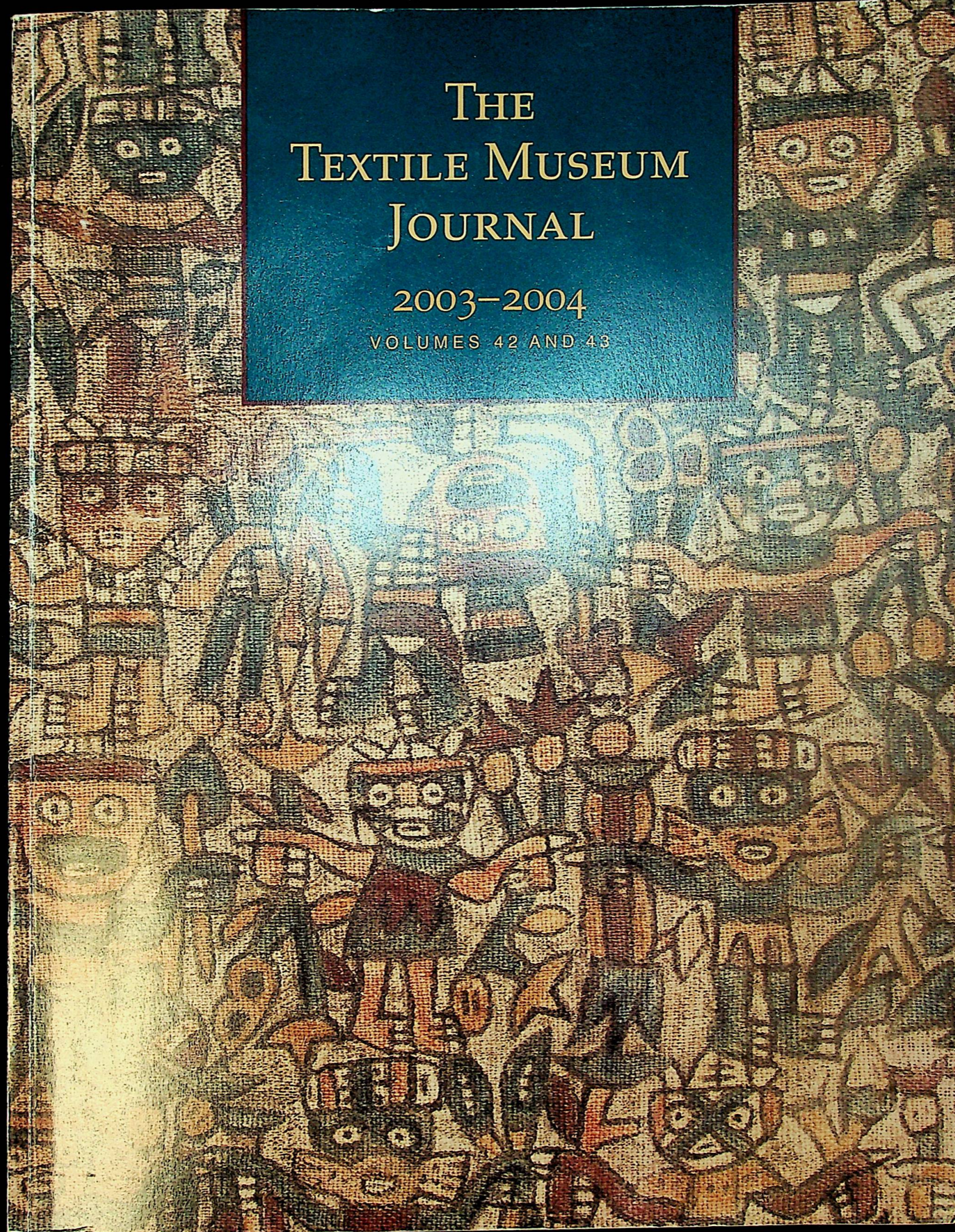


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Front and back covers: Skirt panel from a woman's dress (detail, warp direction horizontal), overall size: 82 x 158.5 cm. The Textile Museum 1964.31.2, museum purchase. See Mary Frame, *What the Women Were Wearing: A Deposit of Early Nasca Dresses and Shawls from Cahuachi, Peru*, pp. 13–53, fig. 24.

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Fig. 1. Fluffing up wool using the bow. Luis Chicaiza Jiménez, Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Photograph by Lynn A. Meisch, 1988.



Fig. 2. Forming the cone. Alfonso Chicaiza Jiménez, Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Photograph by Lynn A. Meisch, 1988.



Fig. 3. Working the cone on the griddle. Alfonso Chicaiza Jiménez, Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Photograph by Lynn A. Meisch, 1988.

Felt Hat Making in Highland Ecuador

Ann Pollard Rowe and Breenan Conterón

The production of felt hats entails an Old World technique, one that is based on the tendency of the surface scales of sheep's wool to catch on each other when rubbed in the presence of moisture to form a solid fabric. European felt hat-making techniques were introduced into Ecuador soon after the Spanish conquest and have survived apparently unchanged to the present day, although machine-made hats are now increasingly used. Presumably because the technique and shape of the hats are European, and most makers are Spanish-speaking, the terminology is Spanish. Until recently, the style of handmade felt hats was the most distinctive clothing item marking an indigenous person's place of origin.¹

The hats are or were usually made by mestizo men (and their families) living in towns adjacent to indigenous communities. In the *caserío* (neighborhood) of Pomatúg at the east end of the town of Pelileo (southeast of Ambato) in Tungurahua province, hats are made for many of the different groups in central Ecuador, including those in Tungurahua, Chimborazo, and Cañar provinces. In Cotopaxi, a small amount of hat making is still done in Pujilí (west of Latacunga). In Loja province it was done in the town of Saraguro. In Imbabura, the major hat-making community was Ilumán, an Otavalo area community, in which hatmakers included indigenous people, but now the industry has mostly converted to the finishing of machine-made felt. The Picuasi family (indigenous) is the last one making felt hats from start to finish, including contemporary fedora styles and the González Suárez-San Pablo del Lago style. A few hatmakers have also been reported in Ibarra and Mariano Acosta in the eastern Imbabura area (map 2).

Pomatúg, Tungurahua

Although hat making is now dying out, some twenty families were still practicing the trade in this community in 1988.² The hatmakers are middle-aged mestizo men and their families, who said that they had learned the trade from their parents but that their sons were engaged in more profitable and less strenuous occupations. The hatmakers also re-block and clean old hats.

Some hatmakers specialize in a particular hat style. Two brothers, Alfonso (age 62 in 1988) and Luis (Lucho) Chicaiza Jiménez, both of whom we visited, are the only remaining makers of Salasaca hats (worn southeast of Ambato). Rafael Yaguar (age 65 in 1988) is the last maker of "fine" Pilahuín and Chibuleo hats (worn southwest of Ambato). He makes two per week, which sell for \$12.00 (Ecuadorian sucres converted to 1988 US dollars); his wife makes less fine ones, which sell for \$6.00.

We also visited Luis Alfredo Perazo Yaguar, who makes Chimborazo style hats sold in Riobamba and Alausí, Cotopaxi style hats sold in Latacunga, as well as styles worn around Guaranda, Cañar, and Cuenca. Each week, they make eight to ten fine hats (which sell for \$4.00 each) for indigenous buyers, and two dozen less fine ones for folklore groups (*comparsas*) in Guayaquil high schools (which sell for \$2.00–\$3.00 each). The family works at home five days a week and goes to the Riobamba market on Saturdays. Intermediaries (*revendones*) also come to their house to buy.

The Salasaca hats are much thicker than the other kinds of hats made in Pomatúg (see fig. 21, p. 90). The wool comes from the *páramo* (e.g., the Llangahua area, near the western edge of the province) and is sold in Ambato. Three *libras* (3.3 pounds, 1.5 kilograms) of raw wool are used for one such hat, and three days are required to make it. The finished hat sells for the equivalent of \$12.00–\$17.50. These hats are not sold in the Ambato market like the other Tungurahua styles but must be specially ordered.

First, the wool is washed with cold water in an irrigation ditch and dried. It is then teased by hand and any remaining foreign matter is picked out. Next, it is carded with European style carders. Both teasing and carding were being done by old women while we were there. After carding, the artisan forms a batt with a twist of her wrist. The next step is to cut the carded batts into small pieces with scissors.

Then the wool is fluffed up using a bow (*arco* or *floreador*; fig. 1). The wool is placed on a table made of reeds in a corner of the room. The bow is suspended by its center from a rafter with a rope and held horizontally. The left hand grasps the back of the bow on the near end, while the right hand holds a detached wooden bar (*tocho*) which is used to rapidly strike the twisted leather (sheepskin) thong of the bow, causing it to vibrate. The bar has a groove that fits the leather thong. Two hours are required to fluff up enough wool for one hat.

Then the wool is piled about 13 to 15 centimeters (5–6 inches) high in a bell shape (*hoja*) on a piece of heavy canvas (fig. 2). Another smaller piece of canvas is placed on top and then another layer of wool. The center canvas does not cover the curved edge, however, so that the two pieces will be joined along this edge (*cono*). The outer canvas is folded over the cone in order to cover it on both sides.

The cone is then worked (*golpeado*) on a heated iron sheet (*plancha*; fig. 3). The sheet is supported on a brick stove with a cavity under the sheet that contains hot coals. Cold water is sprinkled on the sheet, and the cone is then placed on the sheet and sprinkled with more water. It is pressed with the hands and also ironed with an iron that is simply heated over the coals. If the fabric is too thin, it is moved to the table and more wool is added. We watched another hatmaker perform this process by dipping his hands in water and then patting and pressing the wool in its cloth envelope, turning over the wool periodically, and unwrapping it periodically to see how it was coming along. The motion used was much like kneading bread dough. The hot pressing process takes two to two and a half days for a Salasaca hat.

After the felt has formed and the two halves are joined, the cloth covering is removed and the cone is allowed to dry. To form the brim, the bottom of the cone is dipped into a pot of boiling water, and then it is kneaded again on a wooden table. The kneading is done with the lower part of the cone alternately folded over itself and rolled over a small rod, which we saw being done on Chibuleo style hats (fig. 4).

The hat is then placed over a wooden mold (*horma*). A piece of cord is tied around the wool over the form to make the angle between the crown (*copa*) and brim (*falda*). The maker then beats and smoothes the felt using a wooden tool, again standing at a wooden table. The wool is damp, though we did not see him actually add water to it. When the brim is formed, a knife is used to trim the edge and make it even. Luis Chicaiza has seven small wooden sticks (*medidas*) to measure the width of the brim, and three molds for the crown. He noted that formerly Salasaca hats had broader brims and higher crowns than they now do. Also, in the past, the brim of a man's hat was wider than that of a woman's. Another maker used a leather band with four holes in it to mark the width of the brim by putting a nail through the hole.

During the final shaping, the maker uses a wooden wedge (*pieza*) to beat downward toward the cord against the sides of the crown. This tool is also used to smooth the crown. Beating and smoothing motions are alternated. The maker also has a rectangular wooden block (also called *pieza*) that he uses to smooth the brim and the crown (fig. 5). He pounds the crown cord down below the level of the mold and then turns the hat upside down on the edge of the table and

Fig. 4. Shaping the brim of a Chibuleo hat. Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Photograph by Lynn A. Meisch, 1988.



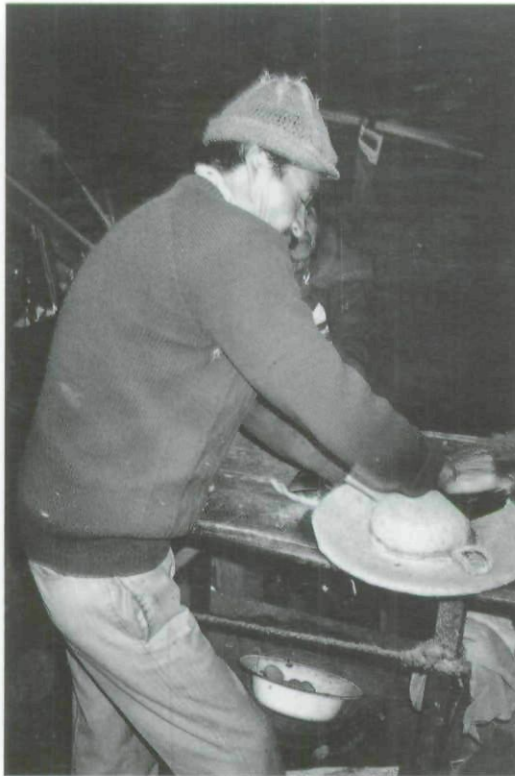


Fig. 5. Smoothing a Salasaca hat with a wooden block. Luis Chicaiza Jiménez, Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Photograph by Lynn A. Meisch, 1988.

pushes the brim back to the level of the mold. Then he turns it right side up again and smooths the brim, holding the crown down with his left hand, and moving the rectangular block back and forth several times with the right hand. This process is alternated with beating and smoothing the crown. After we watched him do this for about a half hour, he removed the cord and rubbed the crown using the wedge, holding the hat so that it was sideways and the brim hung over the edge of the table. This step eliminates the groove formed by the cord. The hat is then hung on a hook outside the door to dry in the sun.

The next step is to harden the hat by adding a gum made from cowhide (*cola*). One libra (1.1 pound, 500 grams) of this material is used for one Salasaca hat; it comes in hard black lumps and must be dissolved in boiling water before use. When the water cools, the gum is rubbed with a small stick onto the hat, little by little, until each dose is absorbed. The hat is then hung up to dry again in the sun.

The final smoothing is done with a pumice stone (*casajo*). At the same time flour, generally



Fig. 6. Flouring and rubbing a Salasaca hat with pumice. Luis Chicaiza Jiménez, Pomatúg, Tungurahua province. Slide by Maritza Mosquera, 1988.

maize flour (*maicena*), is applied to make the hat white (fig. 6). Some hatmakers use talc (*talco*) instead of flour. The maker sprinkles the table with flour and rubs it with his hand, then lays down the hat and rubs it with the pumice in a manner similar to that described above for the wooden blocks. Then he sprinkles more flour on the top of the hat and continues to rub it with the pumice. He turns the hat on edge, with the side of the crown on the table, and scrapes the edge of the hat. Then he turns the hat upside down with the brim on the table and the crown off the edge of the table to rub the underneath edge of the brim. Luis Chicaiza then trims the edge of the brim with scissors and rubs it with pumice. The pumice is also rubbed inside the crown with the hat upside down on the table. Then the maker irons the hat, alternating this with more rubbing. The iron is reheated a second time and the hat is ironed again.

The hatmakers sell the hats without any trim. The intermediaries apparently add the white top button, strings over the crown, and white cotton band around the crown, all of which are characteristic of the thin styles sold in the markets of central Ecuador. Frequently, the customer buys additional colored trim and takes the hat to another person in the market to have it applied with a sewing machine.

This procedure was expected, for example, in the Cañar market and in the Ambato market for styles other than Salasaca and Pilahuín-Chibuleo.

Cacha, Chimborazo

The only other hat making we saw was in Cacha Machángara (south of Riobamba) in Chimborazo province. We were told that two local men (the Guapi brothers, from Pucaraquínchi, another Cacha community) had learned hat making in Pelileo in a six-month course. This story agrees in essence with information supplied by a woman we met in Pomatúg, who said that her father, Bolivio Céspedes, was sent to Cacha in 1985 or 1986 by an Italian development team to teach the people of Cacha to make hats, and that three Cacha men also came to Pomatúg to learn from her father. When we were in Cacha, the Cacha men in turn were teaching two Cañari men and a woman from Cuchucún.³ The Cañaris were planning to return home and teach others. In addition to the local style, they were making tourist hats to be sold in Quito.



Fig. 7. Tying fiber into a cloth package for felting. On the table are wooden hat molds and finished hats. Picuasi family, Ilumán, Otavalo, Imbabura province. Slide by Lynn A. Meisch, 1993.

Ilumán, Otavalo, Imbabura

Some further information on hat making in Ilumán is available in the senior thesis of Laura Conterón (ms.), sister of Breenan.⁴ She notes that merino or other long-fibered wools are not suitable for felt. The wool must be neither extremely fine nor ordinary. The preferred wool used in Ilumán is from Saquisilí (northwest of Latacunga). The process is similar to that described above for Pomatúg.

After dirt is picked from the fleece, it is boiled to remove the grease and washed in the irrigation canal or river. When it has dried, it is teased by hand, then carded, and cut into pieces with scissors. It is fluffed up with a bow, again with a sheepskin cord. The wool is then made into triangles (*hojas*), and these are doubled to form cones (*conos*), with a cotton cloth (*mediana*) in the middle. The cone is wrapped with a coarse cotton cloth (*cañamazo*) (fig. 7). It is saturated with water and beaten with the fist on a heated bronze plate. The cone is revolved every five minutes and the bundle opened every half hour to check on its progress. It may be necessary to readjust the wrapping or add wool in any thin places. This work continues for three days. Then the cone is soaked with boiling water and rubbed with the hands for three hours on a table, after which it is formed into a hat on a wooden mold.

Hats are hardened using a vegetable pitch or resin that is ground with mortar and pestle. The steam compacts and hardens the combination of pitch and wool, so that the hat is heavy and waterproof. Brown (*pardo*) hats are colored with ground-up ochre. The ochre is mixed with wool fuzz that comes off the hat when it is polished with pumice; white pork lard is then added; and the mixture is pounded on a rock until a fine paste is formed, which takes thirteen hours. The mixture is rubbed into all parts of the hat except the inside of the crown. Gray (*lomo*) hats are dyed with the pods (*vainas*) of the *huarango* plant.

Notes

1. See Rowe ed. 1998.
2. We are grateful to Gail Felzein for introducing us to Rodrigo Rodríguez, who in turn introduced us to the Pomatúg hat makers in July 1988. The text was written by Ann Pollard Rowe based primarily on her notes and on the excellent notes of Breenan Conterón (who is from Ilumán). Rowe and Conterón visited only the workshop of Luis Chicaiza. Additional information is included from notes by Lynn A. Meisch and Earthwatch volunteers Adele Pollack, Marjorie Hirschkind, Leonard Evelev, and Norma Jean Nelson, as well as from photographs by Lynn A. Meisch and volunteer Maritza Mosquera.
3. Meisch in Rowe ed. 1998, p. 235.
4. Lynn A. Meisch obtained a copy of the thesis and permission to cite it.

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